

The Economy of Open and Distance Learning: Evidence from Literature Review

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Abstract

This paper focused on analyzing the significant contribution of Open and Distance learning in inclusive growth education and its economy in general. Data collection was based on documentary review of 15 empirical studies in Africa and worldwide. Content analysis was used in analyzing data collected from prior empirical studies. Finding using content analysis has indicated that open and distance learning offer inclusive growth education to disadvantage population. In additional, financial saving, education services, poverty reduction, time saving and women empowerment were identified as an economy played by open and distance education. The study recommended that the Nation education scheme of any developing countries should be enforced and encouraged to facilitate open and distance system in order to boost social economic development and include the disadvantage population in higher education system.

Key Word: Open and Distance learning, Inclusive education

1. General background of the study

Due to fast growing economies of the world and the need of large skill based manpower to sustain the economic growth, many countries has facing an increasing challenges in terms of access to higher education(Gulati, 2008; Ndhlovu, et al.,2015). Problems of quality and lack of resources in developing countries are compounded by a new reality faced by higher education institutions, which of ever-increasing demand for access to university education. Scholars such as Gaba and Li(2015) have argued that, the existing formal higher educational system in many countries will not be able to meet the demand of the economy. As argued by Besong (2014) that, the few higher institutions in the state cannot absorb those qualified or yearning for qualitative education including the teaming population of secondary leavers who are qualified for admission but do not have access for qualitative education for one reason or another. This may be due to the inadequate number of higher institutions. As it is advocated by Gulati (2008) that, enhanced access to qualitative education may bring a balanced development and job enrichment. Hence there is a need to find education system that could help to bring education that could balance

with speed of development. To achieve such challenge of access to higher education which is affecting balance in development scholars have argued that the use of open and distance education is a solution that bring balance between education and development. For instance Heydenrych (2015) advocate that distance education is perceived as the more affordable alternative and is presented as the answer to increasing needs for higher education. As argued by Dar and Yeasmin (2010) that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system has been correctly identified as a panacea for the myriad of problems in the educational systems throughout the world. With this dynamic economic environment today, Open University has become an invaluable component of national educational policies, programmes and practices in both developed and developing countries. In Zimbabwe, the idea of an open university was conceived in the early 1980s after the government realized that the University of Zimbabwe, the sole university at that time, was failing to cope with the rising demand for university education (Njaya,2015).In Tanzanian, the government has also acknowledged distance education through the establishment of the Open University of Tanzania using the Act of Parliament No. 17 of 1922 as an important element of the Nation's education initiative. Yet, despite the rapid expansion of distance education institutions, policy-makers have limited evidence regarding the actual outcomes and impact of such initiatives. On the other hand, Newton, et al.(2014)found that , the development of an appropriate distance learning curriculum for green economy courses has received little attention previously. Given this situation, this article fill the gap by analyzing the contribution of open and distance learning in terms of inclusive growth education and its economy in general.

2. Methodology

Documentary review of empirical studies was used. As argued by Goretti (2008)that, documentary review compiles and evaluates the research available on a certain topic to create familiarity with current thinking and may justify future research into a previously overlooked or understudied area. This article reviews 15 peer-reviewed empirical studies on inclusive education and the economy of distance learning in Africa and worldwide. Data were analyzed using contents analysis. Content analysis is a research method for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context, with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts and a practical guide to action. As in this study, content analysis allows the researcher to distil words into fewer content related categories or issues to enhance

understanding of the influence of distance learning on inclusive education and its economy in the communities.

3. Results and Discussions

In review of past empirical studies in the current study, six main themes namely inclusive growth education, Poverty reduction, Financial saving, Time saving, Education and women empowerment were identified to explain the economy of distance learning as described below:

3.1 Inclusive growth Education

Through review of four articles it was found that, distance learning facilitate inclusive education to the population who were not accessing higher education and were unable to enroll in conversation school. The possible explanation of inclusive education as enabler of disadvantage group was found in Singh and Paliwal (2012) who found and indicated that, distance education is educational mode which provide an opportunity to those who left the study in between and want to be part of the regular system and want to be part of the learned society. On the other hand, Gunawardena and Lekamge (2010) found that open and distance learning as a good mode of learning which facilitating learners who were mostly disadvantaged due to gender, age, lack of formal education, residence in remote locations or employed, who were denied tertiary, adult or lifelong education due to the various barriers that prevented them from continuing education. Dar and Yeasmin (2010).The rationale of distance education is to ensure equal opportunities of education to disadvantaged sections of the society who, because of financial, geographical or time constraints, are not in a position to upgrade their education, knowledge and skills. Laaser (2008) has found that distance learning to be a good approach for localization of education and democratizing education to those who are unable to join conversional approach. Supporting finding from Sukati, et al.(2014) has indicated that distance learning is adopted as an alternative to tackle the priority areas of national need and provide access to equitable education opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied. Gulati(2008)concludes that distance education extend education opportunities that extend to disadvantaged and poor populations. In related perspective, Heydenrych (2015) indicated that distance education offer more affordable alternative and is presented as the answer to increasing needs for access to higher education to a population who is at disadvantage. Similar, empirical support by Ndhlovu,

et al. (2015) argued that open and distance education is a viable option or opportunity in addressing the growing demand for education for socio-economic transformation in Zambia.

These findings has concurred with argument made by Singh and Paliwal(2012) that open and distance learning has to be as an option to reach the unreached population and provide education at the doorstep of the learners and according to their convenience. They further advocate that, distance learning is introduced in the country with a view to democratize education, so that it covers large segments of population, vocations and professions. Belwal, et al. (2010) has found that students originating mainly from remote regions of Ethiopia, distance learning can offer good opportunities of receiving cost-effective, quality education on their doorsteps. This experience could contribute immensely to the extension of such programs to other regions of the country.

This findings and conclusion of prior studies implies that open and distance university has been established with aims to raise the standard of education and to give the people educational opportunities by democratizing education and to create a class of competent people by raising the standard of education of the people generally.

3.2 Poverty Reduction

Through review of four articles it was found that, distance learning help to transform the socio-economic lives of people which in turn helps to reduce poverty. For example, Ndhlovu, et al. (2015) found that through distance learning societies can acquire right knowledge, skill, values and attitudes that are oriented to transforming their socio-economic lives. In related perspective, Besong (2014)revealed that open and distance learning serves as an instrument or tool of mass instruction geared towards balancing development in terms of manpower development, productivity and job enrichment of the beneficiaries and also the society in terms of education for all. He further argued that, distance education is a tool that helps to eradicate poverty, superstition, HIV/AIDS, squalor and diseases. It is a process of increasing productivity through qualitative education. This reduces poverty, diseases, HIV/AIDS and superstition

3.3 Financial Saving

Through review of four articles it was found that, distance education help to save cash in different perspective. For example, Ndhlovu, et al. (2015) has found that distance learning to increase the capacity of education institutions without extensive building of infrastructure by

allowing learners the flexibility to remain in their communities or work places. The finding implies that, university surviving without extensive building of infrastructure will help to save cost and have good financial implication. In related perspective, Simmons (2001) found and conclude that, distance learning degree programs appear as a key strategy for reducing the cost of higher education by replacing professors with computers and part-time teachers.

On the other hand, Sukati, et al. (2014) concluded that the distance learning offer average costs per student were lower than in its conventional counterpart. Such a finding implies that many students can be educated through the distance learning than through conventional educational means. Similarly, Simmons (2001) argument and findings have indicated that distance learning is a cost-effective way of providing more students with access to higher education. Further, Olakulehin and Panda(2011) findings have revealed that, the private costs for students studying through education via the distance learning mode were significantly lower than those involved in pursuing university education via the conventional education mode such as the University of Lagos. On related perspective, Mehran and Abdulrahim (2015) indicated that, open and distance learning has a constructive role in reducing costs, efficiency and human force productivity.

3.4. Education Time Saving and not wasting

In empirical review most of findings have indicated that, open and distance education play a great role of saving time for the population who want to acquire and access education while they are continuous with their daily social-economic activities. For example in an empirical studies by SarKar (2015) it was found and support, that distance education offer a golden opportunities for working employs/people as they can continue their studies in this stream through open and distance mode while increase their skill and capacity in their sector and can try for the betterment for job satisfaction. On related perspective, Mehran and Abdulrahim (2015) indicated that, open and distance learning is an optimality update educational method which prevents educational time wasting that allow learners to continuous with human force productivity while pursuing their academic productivity. Similarly, Ndhlovu,et al. (2015) found that open and distance learning is an opportunity to learners who work full-time and who are unable to attend full-time conventional mode of learning to acquire education relevant to their career paths. Dar and Yeasmin (2010).Education being a dynamic process, the need of the hour is to use it in a positive direction with the changing demands of the society and thereby improve the living standards of the people.

3.5 Education

In the review of past studies, it was indicated that distance learning is a potential a tools for education. For example, SarKar (2015) found that, distance learning play an important and viable role in improving overall skills of man force in the globalization and knowledge based economy of 21st century. On the other hand, Besong(2014) found that open and distance learning is a formatory education strategy which is used to solve the problems of over growing number of candidates who do not have higher education and need higher education. This findings implies that, distance learning when is allowed to be in academic system it will act as a tool that increases number of professionals in all facets of development. Teachers, Nurses, Accountants, Bankers, lawyers, Clerks and Engineers need to be professionalized so as to boost efficiency and productivity in the state. This has concurred with, Quan-Baffour, K.P. (2009) who found that, open distance learning has a power to provide millions of Africans with education at their door steps. This means that, when education is accessible many Africans can acquire knowledge and skills that may enable them to play meaningful roles in continent.

3.6 Women Empowerment

In empirical review most of findings have showed that, open and distance learning act as enables of women. For example, Njaya (2015) found and revealed that a significant number of respondents were working married women with children who found open and distance learning framework more compatible with their multiple tasks; household chores, education, wage work, family, relatives and community at large. This findings implies that open and distance learning helped women to circumvent constraints of time, space, resources and socio-economic barriers thereby significantly contributing to their empowerment. On the other side, Afolayan(2015) Open and Distance Learning, evidence shows, a better approach in Nigeria in the empowerment of the marginalized groups, especially women. He further indicate that, many of the difficulties and concerns experienced by women, particularly those in rural or low-income areas, point to the fact that distance education may be an ideal way for them to access education, since it potentially enables them to do most of their studying from home if they wish to do so, thus reducing the

need to conflict with social or cultural requirements its evident that there is no end to the various advantages accrued to Distance education as an empowerment strategy for women.

4. Conclusion and recommendation

This study concluded that extension of open and distance learning is one of the solutions for education problems and intricate because it is thrifty both economically and quantitatively benefit which include inclusive education and women empowerment. It is further concluded that by applying suitable technology for costs reduction and increasing efficiency and optimizing the costs of education are main principle of economy of open and distance learning. The Nation education scheme in any developing countries should be enforced and encouraged to facilitate open and distance system in order to boost social economic development.

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